Utopian semiospheres:
Isolation and dialogue across borders

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Abstract. The paper applies Juri Lotman's theory of the semiosphere to utopian studies with the aim of identifying the principal components and mode of functioning of classic utopian discourse. Without questioning the ultimate result of any interaction within a utopian dialogic situation, which necessarily demonstrates the superiority of the ideal world (no-place/ou-topos) over the external world of imperfection (e.g. Europe or America), it is argued that the encounter between the utopian and non-utopian semiospheres offers an interesting starting point for a discussion of intercultural translation and dialogicity involving two different mechanisms of sign production. Contrary to its 'real-world' counterpart, where the sign production is governed by asymmetry, binarism, replacement, and diversification, the utopian semiosphere relies on the truthfulness of signs, all-encompassing semioticity, unifying enhancement, and homogeneity. The hyperbolization of the opposition between the ideal state and the external world is metonymically reflected in the construction of the utopian state itself, with its centre and periphery radically polarized and separated by the impassable internal boundary. Although typical representations of the external utopian boundary foreground its distinctly separative function, multiple acts of the intercultural exchange between representatives of the two semiospheres expose the boundary's translatory function.

Keywords: utopia; semiosphere; boundary; centre; periphery; utopian language; translation; dialogue; isolationism

The different substructures of the semiosphere are linked in their interaction and cannot function without the support of each other. This is the sense of semiosphere in the contemporary world, steadily expanding into space over the centuries, it has now taken on a global character, and includes within itself the call signs of satellites, the verse of poets and the cry of animals. The interdependence of these elements of the semiosphere is not metaphorical, but a reality. (Lotman 2005: 219)

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One of the recent definitions of utopia characterizes it as "the imaginary reconstitution of society" (Levitas 2013: xi). Whether undertaken as a work of fiction, a blueprint, or an intentional community, utopia invariably constitutes an entity in which semiosis plays a key role, both in its internal operations and its functioning as a model to be followed by the external world. Consequently, all utopias possess their own semiospheres (*sensu* Lotman 1990) whose relationship to external spaces of signs ranges from radical difference to the idealization of semiospheres existing in the phenomenal world.

Juri Lotman's early theory of the semantic/moral significance of spatial relations (Lotman 1965), reconceptualized in *Universe of the Mind* (Lotman 1990) as locations within semiosphere originating in projections of cultural values onto geographical space,[2] is particularly important in explaining the enabling conditions for the rise of utopian fictions in Europe. Nevertheless, despite their unique relevance for utopian studies, Lotman's ideas met with negligible response, especially among Anglo-American scholars who dominate the field with their explicitly ideologically engaged publications on the subject.[3] Consequently, despite the immense number of studies on most aspects of utopias and utopianism, their relevance to the problems discussed here tends to be rather limited.[4]

The rise of the modern utopia as a 'no-place' situated elsewhere was based on the hyperbolization of the existing opposition between Europe (identified with Christianity and, thereby, essentially good) and the outside world (identified with paganism and barbarity, so essentially evil). At first, the Renaissance discourse followed the traditional moral geography, only to evolve later into axiologically more ambiguous models, such as those based on the idea of the noble savage inhabiting a less civilized, but morally superior world.[5] In utopia, the valorization of Europe and, later, North America[6] *versus* the far-off land was manifestly reversed. To discuss other changes that the reversed utopian model entailed, verbal constructions

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[2]   See Nöth 2015: 13.

[3]   In fact, the first book-length study consistently to apply Lotman's semiotics of space to the study of utopias was Artur Blaim's *Early English Utopian Fiction: A Study of a Literary Genre* published in 1984 and expanded in Blaim 2013.

[4]   The classic example of a history of utopian fictions in which evident ideological engagement of the author is given precedence over accuracy and unbiased interpretations is Morton 1952. The best historical accounts of early modern utopias are Baczko 1978 (French utopias of the Enlightenment) and Davis 1981 (English Renaissance utopias).

[5]   For a detailed discussion of the European representations of the mysterious world beyond the seas from the early Middle Ages until the Mid-Renaissance see Campbell 1988.

[6]   Our argument is exemplified by the classic and feminist utopias functioning within the Western cultural paradigm. The formulated model of utopian semiosphere, based mainly on English, French and American utopias, may be applicable to utopias from other cultural areas.

of ideal states will be considered in semiotic terms as quasi-real objects that testify to mechanisms responsible for the production of utopia. The concept of the semiosphere makes it possible to depict the author's world and the utopian world as two different, if not opposed, spheres of communication "necessary for the existence and functioning of languages, [but] not the sum total of different languages" (Lotman 1990: 123). Unlike in real semiospheres, in which "on the metalevel the picture is one of semiotic unity, [whereas] on the level of the semiotic reality which is described by the metalevel all kinds of other tendencies flourish" (Lotman 1990: 130), utopian semiospheres exhibit extreme unity also on the level of the presented semiotic reality. As will be explained further, in the two semiospheres in question the processes of linking and interaction of their different sign systems vary. Even though in both these spheres their substructures/sublanguages "are linked in their interaction and cannot function without the support of each other", in the non-utopian sphere "the verse of poets and the cry of animals" (Lotman 2005: 219) are found to be incompatible (asymmetrical), whereas in the utopian domain, for example, in Joshua Barnes's *Gerania* (1675) or *A Voyage to the World in the Centre of the Earth* (1755), they may sing the same tune.

Utopian boundary

In its self-description, the internal space of a semiosphere implies a first-person pronoun:

> One of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation is the boundary defined as the outer limit of a first-person form. This space is 'ours', 'my own', it is 'cultured', 'safe', 'harmoniously organized', and so on. By contrast, 'their space', located beyond the boundary, is 'other', often 'hostile', 'dangerous', 'chaotic'. (Lotman 1990: 131)

In utopian discourse, the reverse can also be true, with one component seemingly remaining intact, i.e. the boundary that separates the narrator's imperfect country/continent described with the pronoun 'our' from 'their' ideal, radically better state: "I had often visited different European countries and had been greatly interested by many things I saw. But in New Amazonia the constant predominating feeling was *amazement*, not mere interest" (Corbett 1889: 46). A sense of wonder, often accompanied by a growing awareness of their own inferiority, is the most typical reaction of the guests to utopia that lasts from their arrival until departure and evidences the uniquely positive quality of the no-place and its semiosphere. "I wondered if I had really drifted into an enchanted country, such as I had read about in the fairy books of my childhood" (Lane 1975[1890]: 15), declares Princess Vera Zarovitch from Tsarist Russia, the female narrator of *Mizora*, who never stops feeling like the genus of an inferior race, which she actually is (Gruszewska-Blaim

2018). Lacking "that charming skill that blends into perfect harmony the beautiful and useful in life" (Lane 1975[1890]: 84), the visitors to utopia are constantly stunned. What strikes them so positively about utopia is not only the all-embracing beauty of the land and its inhabitants but also the goodness, harmony, happiness, respect, orderliness, justice, and wisdom found in their most diverse manifestations in the utopian society and its leaders.

Originally, the utopian country was conceived as situated in an unreachable or unknown part of Earth, e.g. Utopia and Astreada are found on far-off islands, New Athens on a remote continent (Terra Australis Incognita), and Symzonia and Mizora beneath the surface of Earth. Paleveria and Caskia from Jones and Merchant's *Unveiling a Parallel* (1893) are located on a different planet (Mars). Emphasis put on the distance between utopia and the non-utopian world is reinforced by additional natural barriers that block easy access to the former. To reach utopia, often by a sheer coincidence, the protagonist must descend a volcanic crater, "surrounded with Fire and Sulphur" (Anon.1755: 8), or overcome a vehement whirlpool "expecting every moment to be swept into a seething abyss of waters" (Lane 1975[1890]: 14), or cross "vast impassable Mountains, which Nature seems to have made as the Barrier betwixt these wretched People, and those Happy Men who inhabit the other Side of it" (Killigrew 1720: 91). The borderland of utopia is rarely a safe area: the mountains separating Sevarambia from the beyond "are not inhabited by any other thing but Lions, Tygers, Panthers, and such wild and ravenous Beasts as care not much for the society of men" (Veiras 2006[1675]: 60), whereas the jungles surrounding Herland (Gilman 1998[1915]) are traversed by "poison-arrow" savages.

Performing the separative function, the sea, mountains, forests, vast deserts (Burgh 1764; Berington 1737), the earth surface (Anon. 1755), and interplanetary space (Godwin 1638) are equivalent to a time shift in those utopias in which an arduous journey in space is replaced with time travel that swiftly moves the reader (metaphorically) and/or the protagonist (physically) across a temporal gap into a new timespace (e.g. Mercier 1772[1771]; Bellamy 1967[1888]; Morris 2003[1890]; Corbett 1889).[7] Unlike in spatially remote utopias, where the first contact with the ideal country fills the guests with joy and awe, in utopias set in the future[8] the truth about the protagonist's whereabouts (or rather "whenabouts") initially

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[7]   It should be observed that futurity is inscribed in utopian discourse right from the very beginning as the present of the utopian state is the postulated or desired future for the author's and reader's world. Furthermore, the first futuristic utopias, Samuel Gott's *Nova Solyma* (1648) and the anonymous *The Reign of George VI 1900–1925* (1763), are simply set in the future without resorting to any device of transferring the narrator to a different temporal dimension.

[8]   This type of utopia is sometimes labelled as 'uchronia'.

tends to cause distress rather than admiration, which comes only later. Having found out that his nineteenth-century Boston is now a twentieth-century city of "an architectural grandeur unparalleled in [his] day" (Bellamy 1967[1888]: 116), Julian West, the protagonist of *Looking Backward*, remarks, "I did not faint, but the effort to realize my position made me very giddy." William Guest from *News from Nowhere* who falls asleep in the nineteenth-century industrial London and wakes up in a twenty-first-century pastoral place declares: "I had by no means shaken off the feeling of oppression, and wherever I might have been should scarce have been quite conscious of the place; so it was no wonder that I felt rather puzzled in despite of the familiar face of the Thames. Withal I felt dizzy and queer." (Morris 2003[1890]: 56). The spatial or temporal distance, so clearly marked in utopian literature, prompts an unavoidable rift between the utopian and non-utopian semiospheres and prefigures significant divergencies in their functioning.

Before the European or American visitor crosses the utopian boundary, the two semiospheres either have had no prior contact (Lane 1975[1890]; Gilman 1998[1915]) or the utopians' knowledge is sufficiently expert to have kept the non-utopian semiosphere at a distance to preserve "the good which cometh by communicating with strangers, and [avoid] the hurt" (Bacon 1999[1626]: 166–167). An extremely cautious attitude regarding the outsiders, who are invariably looked upon as morally and/or intellectually inferior and, by the same token, a potential threat to a utopian nation – "the virgin of the world", as they present themselves in Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1999[1626]: 173) – is a regular motif of the genre. One of the utopian elders from *The Adventures and Surprizing Deliverances of James Dubourdieu and His Wife* thus explains the necessity of isolation from the outside world:

> O happy generation, who are separated so far from these children of wrath, as to have no communication with them; they are rebels to reason, and God, and by that means the most miserable of men; always subject to fears and mischiefs, created by their own folly; [...] we may therefore bless that eternal power, who at once to secure the children of love from the infection and evil machinations of the children of wrath, sunk so many vast tracts of land to divide us from the rest of this wicked world, and separate us to felicity founded on innocence. (Evans 1719: 90–91)

The awareness of possible disruptions brought by carriers of the alien semiosphere, whose very presence implies accelerated, often unforeseen semiotic processes, results in highly complex procedures of admittance to utopia. By keeping uninvited visitors on probation and, simultaneously, providing them with appropriate guidance, the hosts attempt to inactivate in advance any foreign nuclear structures that may cause an internal irregularity within their own domain of sign systems.

Although hospitality is an indispensable attribute of utopian societies, the gate wide open is almost never the case (Barnes' *Gerania* is an exception to the rule), for the physical boundary functions also as a cognitive and ethical barrier separating the initiated from the uninitiated, good from evil, perfection from imperfection. And thus, in *New Atlantis*, the travellers are requested to take an oath before they obtain the status of guests: "If ye will swear, all of you, by the merits of the Savior, that ye are no pirates, nor have shed blood, lawfully or unlawfully, within forty days past, you may have license to come on land" (Bacon 1999[1626]: 154). The oath is just a preliminary stage of the process of admittance. The authorities of Bensalem, fearing the "novelties and commixture of manners", impose a three-day probation by placing the newcomers in the Strangers' House – a quarantine zone that the Europeans perceive as no man's land: "[...] we are but between death and life, for we are beyond both the old World and the new" (Bacon 1999[1626]: 156). Even when the quarantine period comes to an end, there is still some risk that the strangers will destabilize the ideal country, for they are forbidden to "go above a karan (that is with them a mile and a half) from the walls of the city, without special leave" (Bacon 1999[1626]: 10).

In *Christianopolis*, before being granted the right to enter, every stranger is examined "as to his ideas of life and his morals", "as to his person" and "as to his personal culture", which implies that for the thus established communication to continue, the newcomer must meet high moral and ethical standards (Andreae 1916[1619]: 145–148). In *A Description of New Athens in Terra Australis Incognita*, specially appointed judges conduct a thorough interview with all willing to visit the utopian country, and those who are admitted are marked "in the Face with a most lovely and beautiful Flower" which has a double function of obliging everyone to treat them "with Respect and Hospitality" (Killigrew 1720: 83), whilst at the same time preventing them from leaving the country. In *The History of the Sevarambians*, all visitors must wash themselves in a fountain of water that "cleanseth not only the filth of the body, but it hath that influence upon the humours of men, that they are freed from all those extravagant desires of Lust and Lechery, which agrees not with the Air and Manners of the Sevarambi" (Veiras 2006[1675]: 63). In *Herland* (Gilman 1998[1915]), the three male visitors to an all-female utopia are practically imprisoned in a castle where they are taught the utopian language and prepared for the encounter with the wider circles of utopian women. To minimize a risk of contamination of the ideal system, the utopian guests are usually allowed to stay only for a limited period (as in *A Voyage to the World in the Centre of the Earth* from 1755) which, occasionally, can be negotiated (as in Killigrew 1720). In extreme cases, when the guests from overseas are found too degenerate, they are irrevocably expelled: "[Y]e sons of wrath, therefore

with speed retire from among us, lest your longer stay should infect our blessed bowers" (Evans 1719: 91), or not admitted at all as in *Siuqila*: "Wel, to be plaine, you cannot come there, for we keepe none but suche as are borne and bred in our owne Countrey, therefore no straunger can dwell with us, for if they shoude, we should rather learne their Vices, than they followe our Vertues" (Lupton 1580: 4).

At the departure of visitors, a protective measure is taken to prevent the disclosure of the exact location of the ideal country "lest any nations should be tempted by the lust of power and dominion to make a conquest of us," explains a utopian character from *An Account of the First Settlement, Laws, Form of Government, and Police, of the Cessares, a People of South America*, "to destroy our constitution, and rob us of those inestimable privileges, our civil and religious liberties" (Burgh 1764: 23). In *Herland*, a thorough research on the non-utopian world ends with a similar, though not so definite a conclusion:

> "All things considered", they said, and they did not say a hundredth part of the things they were considering, "we are unwilling to expose our country to free communication with the rest of the world – as yet. If Ellador comes back, and we approve her report, it may be done later – but not yet. So we have this to ask of you gentlemen (they knew that word was held a title of honor with us), that you promise not in any way to betray the location of this country until permission – after Ellador's return." (Gilman 1998[1915]: 124)

Utopian signs and dialogicity

Their apparent geographical and cultural isolation notwithstanding, utopias do not always border on a semiotic vacuum. Lotman (1990: 142) observes: "[I]n reality no semiosphere is immersed in an amorphous, 'wild' space, but is in contact with other semiospheres which have their own organization (though from the point of view of the former they may seem unorganized)." The two adjoining semiospheres intersect at the bilingual and polylingual boundary that facilitates a process of intercultural translation and dialogue (Lotman 1990: 136–7).[9] The "presumption of semioticity" (*sensu* Lotman 1990: 128) and the awareness on the part of non-utopian interlocutors of multiple channels of communication and sign systems in utopia precede the utopian language acquisition, translation, and dialoguing.

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9   "[T]he elementary act of thinking is translation", "the elementary mechanism of translation is dialogue" (Lotman 1990: 143). For the discussion of translation in semiotic terms, see Peeter Torop's *Total'nyi perevod* (1995) and Umberto Eco's *Experiences in Translation* (2000). Dialogicity of Lotman's semiosphere is discussed in Torop 2022: 301–302.

Even when utopia is situated beside thick, impenetrable forests, the savages who inhabit the jungle turn out to have their own language, myths, and stories to tell:

> And as we got farther and farther upstream, in a dark tangle of rivers, lakes, morasses, and dense forests, with here and there an unexpected long spur running out from the big mountains beyond, I noticed that more and more of these savages had a story about a strange and terrible Woman Land in the high distance. (Gilman 1998[1915]: 2)

Following the example of the fictional topography in More's *Utopia* (2001[1516]), in the immediate vicinity of an ideal country, "[o]ther Neighbouring Dominions" (Lee 1693: 2) can be located. Less fortunate than the Utopians, of course, the inhabitants of these dominions may be "a hardy People, and delight in War" (Killigrew 1720: 36), like the "[r]ough, rude, and fierce" (More 2001[1516]: 109) Zapoletes, who reside on the continent in *Utopia*. However, they may also be meek and friendly, like the natives encountered by the colonizers from Utopia who choose to live peacefully and are "easily assimilated" (More 2001[1516]: 109, 67). Among Utopia's close neighbours, there are also "allies", that is, "peoples who recruit magistrates from them" and those whom the Utopians call "friends", and "on whom they bestowed benefits" (More 2001[1516]: 103).[10] Beyond the City of the Sun, "there are four kingdoms in the island, which are very envious of their prosperity, for this reason that the people desire to live after the manner of the inhabitants of the City of the Sun" (Campanella 1981[1602]: 71).

In *Gerania,* that features Pygmies from India as utopians and Homer as their lawgiver, already the first out of the three neighbour tribes met by the Europeans on their way to utopia turns out to be idiosyncratically communicative and hospitable. Wanting "those Channels of expression, which we call Mouths" (Barnes 1675: 5), they send "certain mimical and ridiculous Gestures" (Barnes 1675: 4) to greet the guests: "They received us with no vulgar Civility, expressing by their nods and loquacious motions of their active Limbs, no small pride of our presence" (Barnes 1675: 6). It seems that Gerania, a utopian province that the travellers eventually reach, has never been closed to the external world. On the contrary, it has communicated across borders ever since its origin that involved intercultural dialogue with the Greek poet turned brahmin. The acquisition of fifty-four foreign languages by Gerania's priests, hosting ambassadors from other Indian provinces and sending its own to the neighbour nations turn the communication with the

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10   Discussing More's Utopia, Richard Shephard (1995: 645) observes, "Given the theoretical importance of self-sufficiency and isolation for the success of the Utopian experiment, it comes as a surprise to see how much contact the Utopians have with their neighbors in practice. For one thing, the Utopians engage in a substantial amount of foreign trade."

external world into one of the priorities of the paradoxically open Pygmies' utopia (see Blaim, Gruszewska-Blaim 2020).

Thus, in a more or less rudimentary form, intercultural translation, if only one-sided, occurs even before a visitor from Europe/America breaches the isolation of the utopians. The Europeans who are hosted in Bensalem are overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge the inhabitants of the ideal state have acquired due to their secret missions to foreign countries: "that they should have knowledge of the languages, books, affairs, of those that lie such a distance from them, it was a thing we could not tell what to make of; for that it seemed to us a conditioner and propriety of divine powers and beings, to be hidden and unseen to others, and yet to have others open and as in a light to them" (Bacon 1999[1626]: 162).[11] The Tibetan lamasery from *Lost Horizon* houses "a multitude of books [...]. Volumes in English, French, German, and Russian abounded, and there were vast quantities of Chinese and other Eastern scripts" (Hilton 1990[1933]: 79–80). Apparently, even the utopia in the Centre of the Earth is not entirely cut off from intercultural communication. Addressing his guest, the Conductor remarks: "Know, o Son of Earth! that thou art not the first by many, that Chance has thrown upon our Globe, neither is it impossible for us to visit your World. [...] We can, when we please, transport ourselves to your Regions" (Anon. 1755: 29–30).

While translating the acquired knowledge into the language of utopia, the ideal state carefully and caringly selects the information before communicating it to its citizens. An interesting illustration of the utopia's methodical approach to the data and news from elsewhere as well as the dual function of the utopian boundary can be found in Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1981[1602]). Fully aware of what might befall unfortified states in the world torn by conflicts, the founders of the utopian City surrounded their settlement with as many as seven defensive walls that profoundly enhanced the separative function of the border. However, covered with the entries of the multithematic picture encyclopaedia, e.g. "tablets setting forth for every separate country the customs both public and private, the laws, the origins and the power of the inhabitants; and the alphabets the different people use" (Campanella 1981[1602]: 61), the seven walls also perform the translatory function by rendering useful information on the external world and its semiospheres.

The bonding of the utopian and non-utopian semiospheres, most often neglected in utopian studies, seems of consequence, since neither the utopians could prove their superiority, nor any account of utopia would be given without

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[11]   As Mihhail Lotman (2022: 153) puts it, "Lotman emphasized that during certain stages of culture, a need develops not only to isolate oneself from barbarians, who have been relegated almost to the status of nonhumans, but also to learn from them."

direct or, at least, implied acts of literal and intercultural translation across the border.[12] The European or American protagonists and storytellers who willy-nilly find themselves in utopia[13] initiate the process of translation and thus become the carriers of the boundary's hybrid nature.

In *A Voyage to the World in the Centre of the Earth*, the importance of literal translation is highlighted with the whole sentences quoted in the fictional utopian language, immediately rendered into English. The necessity for intercultural translation is spelled out by the utopian Conductor: "As I perceive you are an Englishman, I shall, as near as possible, adapt my Discourse according to your Manners and Customs, and particularly when I have Occasion to mention Time or Space, I shall confine myself to your Method of calculating" (Anon. 1755: 37). The contact between the inhabitants of the Central and Surface Worlds is facilitated by the utopian skill of reading thoughts: "[W]e have the Gift of knowing the Thoughts of those we converse with. By this means we are much better acquainted with your earthly Brethren than you are yourselves, who can judge only by Appearances" (Anon. 1755: 29–30). In *Lost Horizon*, the British Consul who gets involved in the dialogue with a postulant at the utopian lamasery makes use of a slang word that arouses both linguistic and cultural queries on the part of his interlocutor:

> "SLACKERS?" queried Chang. His knowledge of English was extremely good, but sometimes a colloquialism proved unfamiliar.
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> "'Slacker,'" explained Conway, "is a slang word meaning a lazy fellow, a good-for-nothing. I wasn't, of course, using it seriously." Chang bowed his thanks for the information. He took a keen interest in languages and liked to weigh a new word philosophically.
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> "It is significant," he said after a pause, "that the English regard slackness as a vice. We, on the other hand, should vastly prefer it to tension. Is there not too much tension in the world at present, and might it not be better if more people were slackers?"
>
> "I'm inclined to agree with you," Conway answered with solemn amusement.
>
> (Hilton 1990[1933]: 136–137)

While in Shangri-La, Conway appreciates the extraordinary harmony between the planes of content and expression, "the prevalent mood in which feelings were sheathed in thoughts, and thoughts softened into felicity by their transference into

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[12]   Discussing More's Utopia, Gabriela Schmidt (2009: 33) focuses on "varieties of Utopian translation – the island's translational origin and its relation to Greek culture, its ongoing interactions with the surrounding peoples, and its alleged status as an ideal archetype for the translation of social and political values into Europe".

[13]   In utopias described as if from within, featuring no outside visitors, the function of the utopian guest is to be performed by the reader.

language. [...] He liked the mannered, leisurely atmosphere in which talk was an accomplishment, not a mere habit" (Hilton 1990[1933]: 152). Conversations with the High Lama impart a sense of perfect communication upon him: "There seemed, indeed, something almost preordained in the ease with which their two minds approached each other; it was as if in Conway all secret tensions were relaxed, giving him, when he came away, a sumptuous tranquility" (Hilton 1990[1933]: 142).

It may be argued that the sense of perfect communication experienced by most visitors to utopia results from the nature of ideal signs and sign systems. The utopian language usually sounds "graceful" (Swift 1970[1726]) and is found "the most agreeable in the World" (Veiras 2006[1675]). The language in More's *Utopia* is both "not unpleasant to the ear" and "not surpassed by any other in the expression of thought" (More 2001[1516]: 79). Characterized as "rich and comprehensive" most utopian tongues display simplicity and regularity that make their acquisition relatively easy (Seeber 1945: 595). As the narrator in *Mizora* affirms, "their language was simple and easily understood, and in a short time I was able to read it with ease, and to listen to it with enjoyment" (Lane 1975[1890]: 19). In New Athens, all the words are monosyllables, there are no conjugations, declensions, or articles (Killigrew 1720). There is only one past tense and very few nouns constructed in an iconic way to represent their referents as accurately as possible.

The origins of utopian languages are different – they can be derived from Greek or Latin as well as from barbarous dialects. Raphael Hythloday suspects that "the Utopian people sprang from the Greeks because their language [...] preserves some vestiges of Greek in the names of cities and magistrates" (More 2001[1516]: 93). The language of Paleveria is "similar in form and construction to the ancient languages of southern Europe" (Jones, Merchant 1893: 26). On the other hand, the first lawgiver of Sevarambia turned the original language of the natives, which was "soft, methodical, and very proper for Composition, but not quite expressive enough, and a little too scanty of Terms", to "that degree of Perfection, that, for Beauty and Copiousness, it exceeded both the Greek and the Latin" (Veiras 2006[1675]: 236). Projecting a modern utopia, H. G. Wells' narrator fancies that the language of Utopia "will be a coalesced language, a synthesis of many" with "a profuse vocabulary into which have been cast a dozen once separate tongues, superposed and then welded together through bilingual and trilingual compromises" (Wells 2005[1905]: 18–19).[14]

The importance of dialogue between utopians and their guests, which confirms the excellence of utopia and, simultaneously, compromises the European or American order of things, makes the motif of language acquisition indispensable

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[14]   A comprehensive account of the search for a perfect language is given by Eco (1995). For a discussion of ideal languages in early modern imaginary voyages see Cornelius 1965.

and otherwise useful. In *Memoirs of Planetes, or a Sketch of the Laws and Manners of Makar*, the Makar tongue becomes as if the common good, for it serves as a basic means of communication between the utopians and many a neighbouring country. As one of the Makarians explains, "every nation, whether black or white, that traffics with us, brings up some if not all of its children to speak the Makar tongue with its own, and indeed it is now become a sort of universal language" (Northmore 1795: 39). The very process of language acquisition becomes the first test of the utopians and non-utopians' intellectual capacity. Compared to their guests, the appointed utopians who learn a foreign language are by far the most advanced: "The alphabet once read, and sounds pronounced, they had it perfectly, and expressed the greatest astonishment that I should require them to repeat the same names of things over five or six times, to fix them in my mind" (Symmes 1820: 115).

Utopia eliminates small talk. All acts of communication with strangers, which mirror superiority of the utopia and thereby uphold its *status quo*, either aim at the edification of the outsiders or serve a practical purpose, e.g. trading. In cross-cultural communication, the utopian language is supported by other sign systems.[15] Unsurprisingly, the verbal communication between the hosts and visitors is usually preceded by the use of telling gestures and/or a pleasant tone of voice: "His language was as unintelligible to me as the notes of a singing bird; but his mode of salutation was not. I caught it with the aptness of a monkey, returned his courtesy after his own fashion, and answered him in English, with as soft a whine as I could affect, that my rude voice might not offend his ears" (Symmes 1820: 107). Body language is so convenient that the utopians from *A New Discovery of Terra Incognita Australis, or, The Southern World* make use of it in their everyday interactions, with speech reserved for more complex matters (Foigny 1693[1676]: 114). And "[...] if their way of speaking be admirable, their method of writing is much more," remarks their guest, a Frenchman (Foigny 1693[1676]: 116). Other utopian sign systems, such as spatial planning, political, social, and economic systems, religion, customs, rituals, arts, literature, clothes, food, etc., are also appreciated and commented upon by the visitors. For in a utopian semiosphere nothing seems to lay outside the domain of semiotics – no phenomenon or object, not even a chamber pot is simply itself (More 2001[1516]: 76).[16]

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[15]   "Every living culture has a 'built-in' mechanism for multiplying its languages" (Lotman 1990: 124).

[16]   In this sense, utopia differs from other semiospheres. "The outside world in which human being is immersed in order to become culturally significant, is subject to semiotisation, i.e., it is divided into domains of objects which signify, symbolise, indicate something (have meaning), and objects which simply are themselves" (Lotman 2000: 133).

The dialogue between the utopian hosts and strangers reveals their different attitudes to the nature of sign. None of the signs functioning in the utopian semiosphere are ambivalent, or subject to different interpretations,[17] all the utopian signifiers are supposed to represent objects and states of affairs accurately. In utopia, "the sacred bond between sign and object" (Scott 2004: 8) is always maintained and the truthfulness of utopian signs constitutes a *sine qua non* of the utopian system, manifesting itself on all its levels.[18] Apart from everyday communication which excludes lies or elaborate rhetoric, it can also be observed in the socially sanctioned rituals of expressing gratitude, courting, or honouring important contributions to social life. The affirmation and foregrounding of true signs[19] are well illustrated by the following self-description of the land of Mauqsun: "for goodnesse, godlinesse, obedience, equitie, vertuous lyuing, plaine dealing, and true meaning, that in all the earth is not the like" (Lupton 1580: 4). In the City of the Sun, names given to private individuals or magistrates reflect their personal characteristics – "one is called Beautiful (Pulcher), another the Big-nosed (Naso), another the Fat-legged (Cranipes), another Crooked (Torvus), another Lean (Macer), and so on" – or duties: Magnanimity, Fortitude, Chastity, Liberality, Criminal and Civil Justice, Comfort, Truth, Kindness, Gratitude, Cheerfulness, Exercise, Sobriety, etc. (Campanella 1981[1602]: 61). The same principle operates

[17] One of the very few exceptions to this rule is More's Utopia in which the image of the supposedly perfect state is undermined not only by the Greek-derived names of the island (Noplace) and the person who introduces it (Hythlodaeus – distributor of nonsense): the name of Utopia's capital Amaurotum denotes a Ghost City, the Anydrus river means Waterless. The names of Utopia's officials do not fare much better: Syphogrants denote Silly Old Men or Old Men of the Sty, Tranibors – Plain Gluttons, and Phylarchs – those Fond of Power. For a detailed discussion of More's Utopia as a polyphonic text (sensu Bakhtin) see Blaim 1982. One of the very few authors to follow More's ambivalent attitude towards the idea of a perfect state was Jonathan Swift in his quasi-utopian Book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*, offering a serio-comic account of the land of the horses.

[18] Hanan Yoran (2010: 182) proposes an even more radical view on the function of utopian true signs: "By eliminating all signs – collapsing the signifier into the signified – Utopia eliminates all cultural fictions. This produces a transparent social order – and explains the existence of the all-pervading gaze – based on objective values and facts uncontaminated by symbols; as a result, this order is immune from interrogation, reinterpretation, negotiation and change. It is a reified order, meaningless in the literal sense of the word."

[19] Alessa Johns (2003: 12) regards this tendency as characteristic of patriarchal discourse: "Traditional utopias dwell on symbols and signs. Clothing, gestures, and symbols legitimate the disciplinary power of the state; they regiment the society by identifying people, by molding behavior and regulating desire, and by distinguishing those who hold power from those who do not. Wearing these signs and participating in these practices, the individual is a walking manifestation of the power of the country, a state at once ideal and immutable."

in the heraldic system of New Atlantis where "each noble person bears the Hieroglyphic of that vertue he is famous for. E.G. If eminent for Courage, the Lion: If for Innocence, the white Lamb: If for Chastity, a Turtle: If for Charity, the Sun in his full Glory: if for Temperance, a slender Virgin, girt, having a bridle in her mouth: If for Justice, she holds a Sword in the right, and a Scales in the left hand" (H. R. 1660: 24). The inhabitants of Makar never use exceedingly polite expressions, such as "most obedient, most respectful, most devoted humble servant", as "there is no hypocrisy" among them. "In their epistolary correspondence, Grecian simplicity prevails" and their literature contains "much less of the flowers of rhetorick", instead, "plain simple facts, and energetic reasoning are their predominant features" (Northmore 1795: 131). The same desire for truth and perfect communication motivates their attempts to establish a universal language and purge the discourse of science of all superfluous terms – "the unmeaning names given to it by its original cultivators, who lived perhaps in foreign countries, centuries ago, and whose language is now lost" (Northmore 1795: 132).

The truthfulness of signs in utopia appears so functional and, by the same token, vital that the Houyhnhnms from *Gulliver's Travels*, like the great majority of utopians, find the very idea of lying and false representation counterproductive, if not totally incomprehensible: "[T]he use of speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts; now, if any one said the thing which was not, these ends were defeated, because I cannot properly be said to understand him" (Swift 1970[1726]: 207). Unsurprisingly, in Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* and other utopias, false, intentionally misleading representations are considered criminal offenses: "And that they make semblance of detesting all Lying and falshood, which is wont there to be severely punished" (Godwin 1638: 77). In the sequel to Bacon's *New Atlantis*, the nature of punishment depends on the type of lie: "He that bears false witness, if convict, loses his tongue; a common lier his upper lip, and every malicious Slanderer his under lip. He that is convict of perjury hath his tongue cut out" (R. H. 1660: 46).

Unlike their utopian hosts, the Europeans or Americans find lies of omission, fabrication, minimalization or exaggeration useful, even if not commendable: "None of us wanted these women to think that OUR women, of whom we boasted so proudly, were in any way inferior to them. I am ashamed to say that I equivocated" (Gilman 1998[1915]: 59). Their stay in utopia teaches them a lesson, however, for even trivial lies are not tolerated within the sphere of truthful signs: "I was extremely disinclined to converse, being aware that if I spoke the truth I should fill him with disgust, and if I endeavoured to disguise the truth, and to reply to his inquiries from my own imagination, I might be detected in falsehood, and deservedly turned with contempt out of the country" (Symmes 1820: 148).

Planetes, who presents his country's constitution as exemplary, is thus scolded by his utopian interlocutor: "[...] the inhabitants of Makar are a plain honest people and detest all shuffling and deceit; if you mean therefore to continue in my good opinion, you must act with candour and sincerity" (Northmore 1795: 66).

Brought up in their ideal societies, taught to pursue and cherish the best models of citizenship, Utopians rarely, if ever, must make a conscious choice between right and wrong, scarcity and excess, beauty and ugliness, harmony and disharmony, truth and lies, etc. With negativities being intentionally and radically marginalized in utopias, positivities become as if the only reality – the only option to choose. In most advanced utopias, vices and punishments no longer subsist: "It must not be understood that there was no variety of character in Mizora. Just as marked a difference was to be found there as elsewhere; but it was elevated and ennobled. Its evil tendencies had been eliminated" (Lane 1975[1890]: 32). In less perfect utopias, where the laws, customs and manners still happen to be abused, offenders are so effectively ejected from the utopian centre that they become practically invisible to the public. In both cases, nevertheless, binarism can hardly be considered a characteristic mode of thought.

The presence of foreign visitors in utopia – textually motivated by their double function of providing eye-witness information about the ideal state and offering the exemplary mode of its perception by the reader – entails the introduction of a European or American semiosphere to the people "free from all pollution or foulness" (Bacon 1999[1626]: 173). Reconstructed from the description, sample utterances and behaviour of the guests on the one hand and independent sources on the other, the alien semiosphere constantly reminds the utopians of the negativities they have relegated beyond the boundary of the proper utopia. In this sense the outsiders become the catalysts of binarism.

An unexpected surge in foreign ideas, manners, and reactions within the utopian semiosphere happens to arouse some curiosity about the external world, which breaches, if only temporarily, the supposedly splendid isolation of utopia. Due to the stability of utopian sign systems, however, even a prolonged dialogue with an outsider does not jeopardize the uniformization of meanings. As most European/American rules of sign production and social coexistence are found inferior, inapplicable, if not utterly harmful, their potential circulation or adoption by the ideal country appears inconceivable: "[T]hey had figured out a sort of skeleton chart as to the prevalence of disease among us. Even more subtly with no show of horror or condemnation, they had gathered something – far from the truth, but something pretty clear – about poverty, vice, and crime" (Gilman 1998[1915]: 123).

Contrariwise, the European/American semiosphere undergoes in the visitor's mind a critical re-evaluation and mental reconstitution – sometimes so radical

that the departure from utopia, if not instigated by the hosts, requires serious motivation. In most cases, having considered arguments of their utopian interlocutors, the guest plans to assume the role of an educator and reformer of their own people: "I should be deficient in duty to my country if I did not immediately accelerate my departure to communicate what I had seen and heard. [...] [I]f I found that my countrymen profited by the knowledge which I had already obtained I would with pleasure repeat my visit" (Northmore 1795: 108, 109). In *New Amazonia*, a Victorian woman who wakes up in a utopian society of the year 2472 uninhibitedly verbalizes her feminist position: "Man's arrogance and woman's cowardice have reigned long enough, and it behoves my countrywomen to assert their rights and privileges without further delay. Never mind what the men say" (Corbett 1889: 82).

In most cases, the ending does not show what happens after the account of utopia has reached the external world. Yet the prognostics are not too optimistic (*Gulliver's Travels*, *Planetes, Mizora*), for unlike utopian societies, their real-world counterparts tend to ignore "the good which cometh by communicating with strangers" (Bacon 1999[1626]: 166–167).

Utopian homogeneity

The languages which fill up a semiotic space are diverse and used for different purposes. For example, the language of fashion is not supposed to have much in common with the language of science, unless they operate within a utopian semiosphere. All utterances in the sign systems that the guest equipped with European or American cognitive powers recognizes in utopia appear to intersect strangely with one another, constituting a paradigm which on each level aims to convey a similar, if not identical, message. Whilst Europe or America, described directly or indirectly, screeches in different languages, like a multicoloured parrot, the utopian semiosphere conceives a compound utopian language corresponding to a homogeneous utopian reality.

As the ultimate results of any rendering of one culture into another "are not precise translations, but approximate equivalences determined by the cultural-psychological and semiotic context common to both systems" (Lotman 1990: 37), the visitors often find their own language inadequate to express the uniqueness, beauty, and harmony they experience while in the utopian country:

> For as it was a hard matter to describe unto a man borne blind the difference betweene blew and Greene, so can I not bethink my selfe any meane how to decipher unto you this *Lunar* colour, having no affinitie with any other that I ever

> beheld with mine eyes. Only this I can say of it, that it was the most glorius and delightfull, that can possibly be imagined. (Godwin 1638: 71–72)

When the narrator of *News from Nowhere* attempts to define "a splendid and exuberant style of architecture" of the future London, he informs his reader that it embraces and harmonizes a whole set of seemingly incompatible qualities – "the best qualities of the Gothic of northern Europe with those of the Saracenic and Byzantine" (Morris 2003[1890]: 73). At the same time, he insists that "there was no copying of any one of these styles" (Morris 2003[1890]: 73), which suggests the uniqueness of utopian architecture. Interestingly, the hosts have no such dilemma – their frame of mind, the perfect linguistic tool, and most precise use of language allow them to aptly describe utopia and, with the same high precision, criticize the external world.

Unlike its real-life counterpart, the utopian language tends to remain basically monophonic and monologic, for there is no place for asymmetrical or marginal languages in utopia. In other words, no social jargons, no age-group slangs, no idiosyncratic discourses nor foreign (*viz.* unintelligible) languages resound in the ideal country. Accordingly, the transition from the narrative frame to the central part of the utopian text, paralleled on the content level by the visitor's crossing of the utopian boundary, involves a change in the dominant mode of textual organization. The syntagmatic order of the narrative frame is replaced by the paradigmatic description of utopia. In the paradigmatic mode of presentation, the utopian country exhibits its harmonious and ingeniously ordered nature by means of hierarchically arranged sets of semiotic systems announced in the paratexts (subtitles) as "laws, manners, and customs", further in the text complemented by the descriptions of social and economic structures, religion, architecture and city planning, educational system, art, and science, etc. Though organizing different domains of societal life, on a higher level of abstraction all the above-mentioned semiotic systems are perfectly synonymous, as each communicates the key aesthetic and moral values – beauty and goodness, on which the utopian society is based. Each level of the hierarchy that embodies these values functions as their affirmation realized in a manner appropriate to its character and ideological assumptions.

Apart from beauty and goodness, utopia abounds with many other important values. Justice, simplicity, and equality are invariably realized and communicated by political, economic, and legal systems, being simultaneously displayed in other domains, for example, courting and family rituals. Also, harmony, wealth, prosperity, self-sufficiency, and moderation are spread across different domains of social life: "[O]ur prevalent belief is in moderation. We inculcate the virtue of avoiding excess of all kinds – even including, if you will pardon the paradox, excess of virtue itself" (Hilton 1990[1933]: 64).

The paradigmatic mode of constructing the macro- and micro-spaces of the utopian land, manifesting itself in the strict organization and aestheticization of their physical aspects, applies also to the socio-political organization which exhibits the same qualities of harmony and aptness, forming thereby a consistent sequence of a metonymic *mise-en-abîme*. In *A Pleasant Dialogue betweene a Lady called Listra, and a Pilgrim*, the narrator observes, "This Cittie is not onely adorned with beautie of sumptuous Temples, Towers & costly Houses, pleasant Orchards, & sweete Gardens, but cheefely decked with notable gouerment and celestial Justice" (Nicholas 1579: 293). In consequence, on the highest level, all the different elements of the utopian world become equivalent, functioning as signs with a single meaning identifying that world as the best one possible. The whole utopian semiosphere, as described by the visitor on the one hand and the utopian guide(s) on the other, is therefore a generator of information, yet it produces a single message, which becomes even more significant, when set against flawed Europe/America or the pre-utopian past of the ideal state. On the whole, unlike non-utopian semiospheres, the utopian semiosphere is symmetrical, for only mutual semantic correspondences can be observed within its confines. For example, the permanent education that, regardless of age, all Mizorans engage in is reflected in the cooking recipes they test, the fruit and flowers they grow, or politics they are immersed in. The boundaries between utopian nature, science, art, politics and pedagogy seem to be intentionally blurred, with all the realms constituting a kind of paradigm or palimpsest which upholds the basic truth about Mizora: this is an ideal state where nothing can go wrong, nothing looks, tastes, feels, sounds or smells bad, nothing implies that the future harmony and stability of the country are jeopardized in any way – not even by the stranger from Europe who breaches its isolation, asks disturbing questions and encourages her utopian guide to depart for the surface world.

Among various utopian sign systems, spatial planning constitutes the most legible mode of representation of the fundamental utopian values.[20] In More's *Utopia*, equality finds its expression in that all the cities on the island are "large and splendid and having exactly the same language, customs, institutions, and laws"; they display "the same layout and look the same, insofar as the terrain allows" (More 2001[1516]: 53). The utopian capital city is usually situated in the middle of the country, which turns utopia into a sound social organism. In *A Voyage into Tartary. Containing a Curious Description of that Country, with part of Greece and Turky*, "[...] they

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[20]   For a detailed analysis of the construction of utopian spaces and their functions see Blaim 2013. For other approaches to utopian spatial relations see Marin 1973, Pordzik 2009, Triantafyllos 2021, and Popov 2023.

built a City in the very Navel of their Teritory for the seat or residence of the Soul of this Mysterious Body, from the middle equally to influence all the Parts of its Circumference" (L'Epy 1689: 96). The utopian city's shape is based on the square or the circle,[21] occasionally establishing a relationship of equivalence with the structure of the universe, as in the City of the Sun which is "divided into seven large circuits, named after the seven planets" linked by "four avenues and four gates facing the four points of the compass" (Campanella 1981[1602]: 27), or in Christianopolis, with its square shape "well fortified with four towers and a wall" pointing "toward the four quarters of the earth" (Andreae 1916[1619]: 149). In Mezzorania from *The Memoirs of Signor Gaudentio di Lucca*, the circular layout of the capital and other cities represents the sun, whereas the twelve streets leading to the centre epitomize the rays of the sun and the twelve signs of the Zodiac (Berington 1737: 172).

The central space in utopia can be occupied by the temple, the seat of government, or an institution of learning. The temple epitomizing both power and the highest moral values of the state is distinguished by its impressive size, exquisite architecture, and opulent ornamentation. In Heliopolis, the temple resembling "a Structure like the Pantheon at Rome" stands "[i]n the middle of the Piazza of the Suns Ward, which is Six hundred Paces in Diameter", its "vast Cupola [...] rear'd up into the Air with a double row of Alabaster Pillars, of the Order of Caryatides; the workmanship most delicate, the Drapery of Gold, and the Base of the same, upon a Pedestal of Jasper" (L'Epy 1689: 120–122). The very centre of Christianopolis is occupied by "the innermost shrine of the city which you would rightly call the centre of activity of the state" (Andreae 1916[1619]: 173), whereas the centre of Bensalem in *New Atlantis* is the college – "the eye of the kingdom" and the seat of "an Order or Society, which we call Salomon's House; the noblest foundation (as we think) that ever was upon the earth; and the lanthorn of this kingdom. It is dedicated to the study of the Works and Creatures of God" (Bacon 1999[1626]: 167).

Although magnificence, splendour, or luxury are never part of the utopian system of values, they can often be traced in the description of utopian edifices, both public and ecclesiastical, as signs of the power of the utopian state. Buildings made of ivory and gold, or pavements made of diamonds are a source of immense aesthetic pleasure rather than pride, because being plentiful, they are no longer signs of wasteful luxury, personal power, or wealth. The aesthetic pleasure they arouse in utopians and strangers alike is evidenced in all descriptions of ideal countries:

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[21]   A different geometrical figure is deployed in the urban planning in *A Voyage to the World in the Centre of the Earth* – both the main square and the capital city form a large octagon (Anon. 1755: 87--8).

> Their public buildings might all be called works of art. Their government build-ings, especially, were on a scale of magnificent splendor. [...] One very beautiful capitol building was of crystal glass, with facing and cornices of marble onyx. It looked more like a gigantic gem than anything I could compare it to, especially when lighted up by great globes of white fire suspended from every ceiling. (Lane 1975[1890]: 73)

In utopia precious metals and stones return to their true nature as beautiful and useful building materials[22] equivalent of other resources, e.g. plants that can also be utilized for both practical and aesthetic purposes:

> [T]he place in which this assembly was held was about the middle of the Island, where, in a spatious plain, there arose a magnificent building, if I may call that a building whose walls were all vegetables, for they were compos'd of several lofty trees set at convenient distances, the spaces between each being fill'd up with smaller plants, which being interwoven, each within the other, seem'd a sort of a green wall. (Evans 1719: 86)

Even when the ideal state is based on the principles of equality and utmost sim-plicity, all other buildings open to the public differ from private dwellings, if not in splendour, then at least in size, mainly for pragmatic purposes.

The aesthetics of the utopian private dwellings, responding "fully to every need of the highest culture and taste, without burdening the senses with oppres-sive luxury" (Jones, Merchant 1893: 12), usually relies on uniformity and con-venience, as in *The Capacity and Extent of the Human Understanding; Exemplified In the Extraordinary Case of Automathes*, where it affords "nothing to the Eye which could be thought any-way superfluous; – nothing but what was judged most convenient for the End to which they were designed; – that nothing should be wanting, which was necessary to render Life comfortable" (Kirkby 1745: 17). Paradoxically, in the utopian semiosphere, spectacular magnificence and humble simplicity may become aesthetically and axiologically equivalent because they characterize different domains of public life, where beauty and goodness are just differently expressed

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[22]   An exception to this rule can found in More's Utopia where gold and precious stones are for didactic purposes assigned the lowest position in the hierarchy of values, being reduced to the status of children's playthings or materials of which chamber pots and slaves' chains are made.

Utopian centre and periphery

The semiotic space of utopia, governed by the well-established rules that uphold its flawlessness, appears homogeneous, notwithstanding its periphery, where all irregular and potentially destabilizing elements are relocated. The presence of the utopian beyond is of no consequence because the internal boundary is as rigorously guarded as the utopia's external frontier, which prevents any circulation of subversive elements or information that could undermine the utopian sign systems. If there is any communication between the utopian centre and the periphery, it is of monologic rather than dialogic character. The centre informs the periphery of its requirements, axiology, ethics, aesthetics, etc., whereas the periphery has neither right nor opportunity to respond to or oppose the centre.[23]

Following the model set in More's *Utopia*, the inactive periphery comprises all components deemed dirty, deformed or otherwise offensive – the negative counterparts to the utopian beauty, health, cleanliness, symmetry, harmony, etc. The ideal state removes its various offenders, both symbolically and physically, to the extreme margin of the utopian society or beyond it. It designates, firstly, the peripheral, though still internal, zones for various professions offending the senses; secondly, the high-security zones for slaves and criminals; and thirdly, the external exile zones situated beyond the impassable frontier, where the irreparably deformed (physically, morally, socially, etc.) are deported to become invisibles. And thus, in New Athens, "there is no Trade that is offensive to the Nose, the Eyes or Ears, that is permitted to be in the City itself", so that "Butchers, Poulterers, Smiths, Washer-women, and the like, are confin'd to little Suburbs divided from the City by a small Canal" (Killigrew 1720: 86). Similarly in New Atlantis, where "all offensive Trades more apart scituate, as Brewers, Bakers, Chandlers, Butchers, Tanners, Dyers, Curriers, Felmongers, in some back-parts in the out-skirts of the Citie, by themselves, and neer the River to carry their filth away, least their fulsome Trades should with the badness of their smells offend the more pleasant dwellings, or cause infection" (R. H.1660: 137–38). The cemeteries are also beyond the city limits, for as the narrator of *Christianopolis* explains, "they consider the city to be for the living" (Andreae 1916[1619]: 277).

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23   The only instance, when the periphery poses an actual threat to the ideal order of the host country occurs in the Central World where the inhabitants of the Earthly Quarter settled by outsiders who have accidentally fallen down from the earth surface initiate an armed rebellion which, however, is immediately crushed. To prevent any such future occurrence all male rebels are castrated to ensure that "in a few Years the whole Race of them would be extinct" (Anon. 1755: 225).

Sevarambians employ a complicated semioticized system of punishments assigning special places for different kinds of evildoers: "Thieves, Robbers, and disorderly persons are confined to the skirts of our Dominions where they live to plague one another, but they are not suffered to abide in the middle and bowels of the Kingdom" (Veiras 2006[1675]: 61). All troublemakers are "banished to the Lonesom Islands, where [they] can quarrel with none but with wild beasts that inhabit there" (Veiras 2006[1675]: 89), and "all the disorderly persons, the lecherous, the filthy, and base, each sort have their distinct places of abode, or Islands, from whence they are not suffered to depart till they dye naturally" (Veiras 2006[1675]: 68). Ungrateful children in *Gerania*, first blinded and branded, are sent "into the Fields, and so those who refused to nourish their Parents, are now uncapable of finding nourishment for themselves" (Barnes 1675: 52–53). In New Athens, different punishments are applied to male and female sexual offenders: "the Man is banish'd beyond the Mountains" and the woman, having her face deformed, is sent "into that Quarter of the Town where the Washer-Women are, and under them kept a Slave to hard Work as long as she lives" (Killigrew 1720: 106). In Mezzorania, whoever is caught trying to bribe a judge is branded on the forehead and removed to the outskirts of the country, whereas illegitimate children are taken outside its borders. In the world of the Moon, all infants showing any signs of imperfection are sent to the Earth (Godwin 1638: 104–105). In extreme cases, the utopian offenders, e.g. compulsory adulterers in Utopia, are sentenced to death.

By purging the centre of all potentially subversive elements that do not fit its self-description and/or cause discord in its operation, the ideal state ascertains its own homogeneity. In more advanced utopias, however, where all negativities have been long eliminated, owing to education and/or eugenics,[24] places of confinement have disappeared or changed their purpose. An old prison house in Mizora, closed for over a century because of lack of offenders, is open to the public as a museum. To Princess Vera from Tsarist Russia, the no longer functioning prison testifies to the old utopian prisoners' rights to enjoy art, comfort, and natural beauty – a luxury no contemporary penitentiary system in Europe or America could or would be likely to afford: "Grottos, fountains, and cascades, winding walks and vine-covered bowers charmed us as we wandered about. In the center stood a medium-sized residence of white marble. We entered through a door opening on a wide piazza. Art and wealth and taste had adorned the interior with a generous hand" (Lane 1975[1890]: 116).

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[24]   In the late-nineteenth-century utopias, most zones for offenders, especially involuntary, disappear from the utopian semiosphere, mainly due to changes in the cultural paradigm. Instead, eugenics becomes the prime means to ensure a crime-free utopian society. In the twentieth century, such zones reappeared in dystopias.

The astounding physicality of utopia – its perfect shapes and sizes, rhythmical colour patterns, harmonious sounds, warm, bright light, aromatic smells, delicious tastes, mild temperatures, and delicate tactile qualities are not subject to a comparative analysis in everyday conversations between the utopians. As givens within their ideal world, all these components of the utopian whole, together with the positive values, such as beauty, fertility, goodness, harmony, and luxury, become estranged/deautomatized, only when seen either in the light of the pre-utopian past or in contradistinction to the ugliness, decay, deformity, unshapeliness, harshness, and other negativities of the non-utopian world lurking behind the guest's remarks.

Unsurprisingly, in the utopian semiosphere and, by the same token, in the utopian vocabulary, all negativities constitute a set of marginal and almost invisible components or archaic, mostly incomprehensible terms long out of use. Once pushed to the periphery, or beyond the semiosphere of the ideal state, they never return closer to the centre to undermine the utopian *stasis*. The younger generations of the single-sex society of Mizora do not know the concept of the other sex, despite free access to the gallery where a huge collection of portraits clearly indicate that once upon a time there were males in Mizora. Asked about 'men', Wauna, a utopian guide "professed never to have heard of such beings. [...] 'Perhaps it is some extinct animal,' she added, naively. 'We have so many new things to study and investigate, that we pay but little attention to ancient history'" (Lane 1975[1890]: 29). The ideal state severs itself from any offensive signs and discourses as successfully as from offenders or strangers.

New ideas and semiotic systems brought to the utopian semiosphere from abroad, e.g. Christianity or Greek texts in Utopia, or the art of painting in Mezzorania, become mere additions to the existing set of semiotic phenomena rather than game changers. For once the ideal order has been instituted, the axiological value and hierarchical position of the elements within the cultural field of utopia are no longer exposed to subversive dynamics. Any potential disruption initiates an immediate response of the utopian semiosphere which, as if automatically, removes the genus of an unwelcome development from its confines – utopian offences and offenders are expelled from the centre to the inactivated margins, utopian visitors who disrespect the utopian order are made to leave the country. Failing to observe the utopian courting ritual and replacing it with the English mode of behaviour (Anon. 1783) as well as an attempt to engage in pre-marital sex (Berington 1737) or forceful executing of the marital rights (Gilman 1998[1915]) on the part of the visitors end in their expulsion. The same applies to the citizens of the ideal state. An overzealous convert to Christianity in More's Utopia who denounced the worshippers of other religions as "wicked, sacrilegious,

and worthy to be punished in eternal fire" was arrested and sentenced to exile (More 2001[1516]: 117–118]).

Both the attractiveness of the utopian semiosphere and its functioning rules remain virtually intact, even though, occasionally, a prolonged exposure to the visitor's arguments affects the lives of individual utopians who resolve to visit other, non-utopian semiospheres. The Principal's daughter Wauna accompanies Princess Vera in her returning voyage to Europe to help educate the surface world's inhabitants in the true ways (Lane 1975[1890]). Ellador, an ideal woman and wife to the narrator of Gilman's *Herland* and *With Her in Our Land* decides to go overseas to learn more about the non-utopian beyond (Gilman 1998[1915], 1997[1916]). The three interracial marriages and the birth of the first male citizen of the hitherto all-female Herland leaves a question open about the potential reconstitution of the utopian centre in the future.

The model of the ideal country, with its perfected central space for true utopians and the inferior peripheral zones for utopian offenders, can be perceived as a metonymy of the whole represented space in classic utopias. For in a smaller figure, the inner utopian stratification reflects the division between the better world (*ou-topos*) and the diversely imperfect external world (Europe, America, etc.). Likewise, the basically one-way communication between the empowered utopian centre and the voiceless margins can mirror the tendency in the cultural exchange between the two semiospheres. Whereas descriptions of utopia reach the external world through the visitors' stories strongly advocating the implementation of the utopian model within the European or American semiosphere, the utopian semiosphere is not supposed to be reconstituted (viz. contaminated), since no real change is needed to uphold its flawless functioning.

Coda

To sum up the argument, one of the basic points of divergence between the European/American and utopian semiospheres is that unlike Europe or America, which never stop renewing the Tower of Babel by engendering new languages, dialects, jargons, idiosyncratic sign systems, ambiguities, different interpretations, etc., utopia, in its *statu nascendi*, instigates and makes permanent an opposite mechanism of sign production. Instead of replacement and diversification, the utopian semiosphere relies on the truthfulness of signs, meticulous selection, all-encompassing semioticity, unifying enhancement, and homogeneity to create a compound utopian language and discard all others that might compromise its stabilised unity. Asymmetry and binarism (*sensu* Lotman 1990), so typical of non-utopian semiospheres, are virtually eliminated – the utopian natural language is

translatable into all other utopian sign systems and *vice versa*, whereas the utopian metalevels and meta-descriptions are faithfully reflected in utopian reality. It is only a matter of coincidence, such as an uninvited visit and dialogue with a stranger from Europe or America that necessitates the focused juxtaposition of the positive and negative or the central and marginal within the utopian semiosphere, which otherwise tends to reduce all binary oppositions to minimum. Once the visit of an outsider is over, the utopian guides, as we can guess, are no longer compelled to accommodate binarism in their discourse.

In classic utopian literature, the only real outcome of the acts of translation and dialoguing that take place during the visitors' sojourn in utopia is making them aware of what the best state of a commonwealth should be. Unlike the intercultural exchange with neighbouring countries, the relatively brief contact between the utopians and Europeans/Americans neither targets nor results in establishing a permanent communicative portal, through which new information could travel back and forth. Educated and reformed by the utopian hosts, the visitors go back to their own world to tell and/or publish the story of utopia which reiterates, in one way or another, Hythloday's assertion: "I am fully persuaded that nowhere will you find a more extraordinary people or a happier commonwealth" (More 2001[1516]: 92). Through the description of the ideal world that substantiates harmony, orderliness, soundness, beauty, goodness, and moderation, the European/American narrator becomes a shaper of the readers' imagination, their aesthetic experience as well as critical mind. Getting acquainted with utopia, the informed reader more sharply identifies what is wrong with the world beyond it. To achieve the main objective, that is, to give due credit to the exceptional semiosphere in which utopian ideas flourish, the author must accentuate, however, the separative function of the boundary and radical differences between the two semiospheres, which invariably results in the heightened binarism and asymmetry of the model of the world. The dystopianization of Europe or America that can be observed in utopian discourse is an inevitable consequence (Blaim 2016: 601–614). And thus, what seems to be marginalized in the utopian semiosphere constitutes a steady background to all depictions of ideal states.

Paradoxically, Lotman's own vision of the proper functioning of semiosphere appears to be the exact opposite of classic utopian semiospheres isolated from the outside world, absolutizing their boundaries, producing semiotically uniform individuals, eliminating ambivalence and conflict, focused on autopoiesis, constantly reproducing their constitutive elements and relations among them to ensure their permanence and stability. For Lotman, a properly functioning cultural formation requires opposition, dialogue and plurality of diverse languages and texts from both the inside and the outside of a given semiosphere, whose

stability can only be ensured by constant change involving the presence of differently organized structures and different degrees of organization (Lotman 1979: 84–96).[25] Lotman's preference for change and unpredictability[26] parallels a tendency in utopian literature observed from the beginning of the twentieth century. The loss of utopian rigidities or, to put it differently, the steadily increasing instability of the utopian paradigm has engendered ambiguous utopias which aim to subvert the self-assured and impervious worlds of classic utopias.

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[25] For a discussion of the utopian aspects of Lotman's ideas in the context of the totalitarian state see Blaim 1990: 64–65: "For Lotman, the plurality of semiotic systems and inter-cultural dialogue do not constitute a utopian proposal, although such it might have seem in the Soviet context […] but a necessity determined by the very structure of the human brain and its functioning. […] It seems rather paradoxical that Lotman`s utopian vision of the proper functioning culture, i.e. utopian in terms of Soviet conditions, should rely on conflict and opposition, the essentially non-utopian characteristics. On the other hand, however, it is in perfect agreement with the underlying utopian principle based on the reversal of official dogmas, doctrines and practice." As one of the reviewers of the present paper for *Sign Systems Studies* perceptively pointed out, from Lotman's perspective the ossified and unchangeable semiosphere of classic utopias could only be seen as essentially dystopian.

[26] The concept of unpredictability in culture was developed in Lotman 2013.

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Utopijne semiosfery: izolacja i dialog ponad granicami

W artykule zastosowano teorię semiosfery Jurija Łotmana do badań utopijnych, w celu wyodrębnienia głównych elementów i sposobu funkcjonowania klasycznego dyskursu utopijnego. Nie kwestionując ostatecznego wyniku interakcji w ramach utopijnej sytuacji dialogicznej, nieodmiennie ujawniającej wyższość idealnego świata ('nie-miejsca'/ou-topos) nad niedoskonałym światem zewnętrznym (np. Europą czy Ameryką), dowodzimy, że zetknięcie się utopijnej i nieutopijnej semiosfery stanowi interesujący punkt wyjścia do dyskusji na temat procesów międzykulturowej translacji i dialogiczności angażujących dwa odmienne mechanizmy generowania znaków. W przeciwieństwie do swego odpowiednika ze 'świata rzeczywistego', w którym produkcją znaków rządzi asymetria, binaryzm, zastępowanie i dywersyfikacja, semiosfera utopijna opiera się na koniecznej prawdziwości znaków i wszechogarniającej semiotyczności prowadzącej do wzmocnienia jej jednorodności. Hiperbolizacja opozycji pomiędzy obrazem idealnego państwa a światem zewnętrznym znajduje swe metonimiczne odzwierciedlenie w samej konstrukcji utopijnego państwa, w którym centrum i peryferie są radykalnie spolaryzowane i oddzielone nieprzekraczalną granicą wewnętrzną. Pomimo iż typowe reprezentacje granicy oddzielającej utopię od świata zewnętrznego wysuwają na plan pierwszy jej funkcję separacyjną, to liczne akty wymiany międzykulturowej pomiędzy przedstawicielami obu tych semiosfer wskazują również na obecność funkcji translacyjnej dzielącej je granicy.

Utoopilisefd semiosfäärid. Isoleeritus ja piiriülene dialoog

Artiklis rakendatakse Juri Lotmani semiosfääriteooriat utoopiauuringutes eesmärgiga teha kindlaks klassikalise utoopiadiskursuse peamised komponendid ning toimimislaad. Seadmata küsimärgi alla ükskõik millises utopistlikus dialoogis aset leidva suhtluse lõpptulemust, mis paratamatult demonstreerib ideaalmaailma ("ou-topos'e" ehk "mittekoha") üleolekut ebatäiuslikust välismaailmast (nt Euroopast või Ameerikast), väidetakse, et utoopilise ja mitteutoopilise semiosfääri kohtumine pakub huvitavat lähtekohta, käsitlemaks kultuuridevahelist tõlget ja dialoogilisust, mis hõlmab kaht erinevat märgiloomemehhanismi. Vastandina selle "pärismaailma" vastele, milles märgiloomet valitsevad asümmeetria, binarism, asendamine ja mitmekesistamine, toetub utoopiline semiosfäär märkide tõesusele, kõikehõlmavale semiootilisusele, ühendavale võimendamisele ja homogeensusele. Ideaalse riigi ja välismaailma vastanduse hüperboliseerimine peegeldub metonüümiliselt utopistliku riigi enese ülesehituses, milles kese ja perifeeria on radikaalselt polariseerunud ning neid eristab ületamatu sisepiir. Kuigi utoopia välispiiri tüüpilistes representatsioonides rõhutatakse selle silmnähtavalt eraldavat funktsiooni, toovad nende kahe semiosfääri esindajate vahel aset leidvad arvukad kultuuridevahelise suhtlemise juhud esile selle piiri tõlkelise funktsiooni.